

**ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY ADVISORY COUNCIL
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**

December 11, 2020 9:00 am – 11:40 am
Meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams

Council Members Present: Dave Basley, Chair, Ashland; Peter Bourque, Farmingdale; Brent Hardy, Dedham; James MacCartney, National Park Service rep.; Josie Allen, Haymock Lake; Tobey Pineo, Hampden

Bureau of Parks and Lands Staff: Andy Cutko, Ron Hunt, Jim Vogel, Matt LaRoche

Others Present: Bob McIntosh, Paul Johnson (AWW Foundation); John Skelley (Maine Emergency Management Agency); Al Cowperthwaite, (North Maine Woods, Inc.); Jym St. Pierre (Restore); Hannah Lovejoy; Hannah Stevens (7 Islands); Michael McLellan (NMW); Jenny Ward (AMC).

Introductions and Opening Remarks

Chair Dave Basley opened the meeting at 9:08 am, following instructions from Andy Cutko on use of the Teams application during the meeting, and asked the Council members to introduce themselves. Andy informed all that the call was being recorded. Dave made remarks in recognition of departing member Melford Pelletier contributions to the Council over the past 20+ years and also of Cindy Bastey, recently retired from BPL, who has served as secretary to the Council for the past several years. Brent Hardy added his comments of appreciation to Melford and Cindy. Jim Vogel of the Bureau served as note-taker for this meeting.

Approval of March 13, 2020 minutes

Dave moved that the 3-13-20 minutes be accepted. This was seconded, and the minutes were approved by voice vote.

Director's Report – Andy Cutko

Director Andy Cutko thanked Council members for attending the first “virtual” Council meeting and noted that the Council had not met since the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began. He highlighted several challenges and successes for the Bureau since that time associated with a rapidly changing public health situation, including responding to concerns around the influx of out-of-state snowmobilers in the late winter, coordination of trail closures and closure of State Park beaches in late spring and early summer, followed by large crowds at parks, ATV trails, and beaches later in the summer. Calls were held nearly daily with park staff, Andy reported, to address questions on quarantine guidelines and to coordinate ramped up sanitation efforts. Notably, the Bureau recorded an all-time record for attendance at state park campgrounds, yet no COVID cases occurred among staff nor were any outbreaks traced to any of the parks. Andy relayed a comment from a recent conference of the association of state park directors that outdoor spaces have never been more important for people’s physical and mental health and national statistics that indicate 25-50% of visitors to state parks are new users, and many will likely return, which is a good thing.

St John Uplands Plan

The Final Draft of this management plan for Public Lands in the Allagash region is ready for public comment and a public meeting will be scheduled in the near future, via teleconference. The major change to the Draft plan that has occurred since March is the decision to add the Boot and Pump Handle peninsulas on Eagle Lake to the Chamberlain Ecological Reserve.

John's Bridge Access to AWW

To bring closure to the Council's previous discussion on increasing the period during which boat access is available at this site, Andy stated that the Bureau is in agreement with the Council that the access dates should not be changed.

Retirement of AWW Superintendent

Andy offered congratulations to Matt on his pending retirement in April of 2021, noting the combination of knowledge, humility, demeanor and experience that he has brought to the job, and stated that the Bureau hopes to have an opportunity for a more formal recognition at a later date.

Follow-up Questions/Comments

- Dave added his congratulations to Matt on his retirement and on a job well done and commented that one potential benefit from the COVID situation may be new users who have come to the parks and the AWW.

Superintendent's 2020 Operations and Maintenance Report – Matt

Water levels:

- We brought our water levels up ½ foot over the togue spawning levels and held that level to within 1/10 of a foot through the winter.
- We filled our reservoirs at Telos and Churchill in May, they remained full into early June.
- We had good water levels for canoeing thru early July.
- From early-July thru August we were below 500 cfs except for a one-day spike to 700 cfs on August 19th.
 - From mid-July until the end of August the river was below 400 cfs.
 - People start dragging canoes when the river drops below 500 cfs.
- We did not have an all-day rain event during the entire summer, just a few showers.
- The river is currently at 3410 cfs.
- Telos Dam is currently at 6.1 feet above the sill, we are releasing 812 cfs into Webster Stream.
 - Target fall drawdown level is 5.5 feet above the sill. We consulted with IF&W in mid-August about drawing Telos/Chamberlain down below the target level and reduced the flow in Webster Stream (90 cfs) and Martin Stream (24 cfs) as water conservation measures.
 - Churchill Dam elevation is 928 ft, we are releasing a flow of 341 cfs. Target fall drawdown is 926.8 feet above sea level. We consulted with IF&W in mid-August about the possibility of drawing down Churchill/Eagle below the fall target level. From mid-September on we only released a canoe flow of (500 cfs) as needed as a water conservation measure.

Public use:

- Decided not to rent winter campsites at Kellogg Brook in 2020 due to reduced demand for campsites.
- We did rent 32 of the 40 available sites at Chamberlain Bridge for the winter.
- We offered last year's winter campsites holders the opportunity to register for the same site they had last year by mail, in an effort to reduce potential exposure to COVID-19 for rangers and visitors.
 - As of yesterday, we have had 22 people preregister by mail.
- Camping use is incomplete for 2020, just received the November camping use yesterday.
 - May camping use was down 60%.
 - The AWW was closed to camping for almost the entire month of May due to COVID-19.
 - June camping use was down 35%.
 - July camping use was down 35%
 - I will have an up to date public use report at our next meeting.
- It is interesting to note that the number of parties registered in 2020 was up by slightly.
- We normally have heavy use by youth camps from late June thru mid-August. Only one youth camp that we know of has canoed the waterway in 2020.
- We did see more family and friends groups this year than we have seen in many years. With many more children under 10 years old.
- I have a couple camping use slides that I will show at the end of my report.

Fishing:

- Ice fishing season was very good with several brook trout being taken over 20 inches during the first few weeks of the season but finished with slow fishing for all three of the primary game fish – brook trout, togue and whitefish.
- Spring fishing was very good with many brook trout over 18 inches being caught. An example- I caught four brookies below Churchill Dam in about an hour on May 17th (1-19", 1-18", 1-14" and 1-12"). The fishing on the headwater lakes was equally good. The good fishing died off early due to the unusually warm weather we had from mid-June through the remainder of the summer.
- Fall fishing was only fair with low warm water keeping the fish from moving into spawning areas.

Projects:

- New fire tower cabs were installed on Allagash and Round Pond Mountain towers (Public Lands project).
 - AWW crew dismantled the Allagash Mountain cab down to the floor.
- The AWW visitor survey has been completed in cooperation with UMaine.
 - Funded by UMaine and AWWF
 - That survey is now going through peer review, to be published in an academic journal.
- A new door and lock set was installed at the Churchill Depot shop.
- Roadsides were brushed back from Findley Bogan to Ramsay Ledge Campsite.
- Several courses of rotten siding were replaced on the Umsaskis ranger station.
- The bridge on the snowmobile trail between the Chamberlain parking lot and Chamberlain Lake was re-decked.
- Roadsides were mowed on:
 - Telos Dam Road
 - Lock Dam Road
 - Jaws Road
 - Bissonette Bridge Road
- Bog bridging was replaced on the outhouse trails at:
 - East Twin Brook Campsite (40')
 - Sam's Campsite on Umsaskis Lake (about 50')
 - Smith Brook Campsite on Eagle Lake
 - Breezy Point Campsite on Eagle Lake
- Rotten bog bridging was replaced on the Round Pond tower trail.
- An outhouse was prefabricated for the new campsite near Twin Brooks.
- Old quarter round was removed from the exterior of the Eagle Lake ranger station. Perma-chink has been installed in place of the quarter round.
- Cleared the following trails:
 - Round Pond tower trail, Allagash tower trail, Second Ridge trail (Eagle Lake), Big Eddy portage trail, tramway portage trail.
- Replaced the sills and floor in the bunk house at Lock Dam.
- Cut, peeled and replaced rotten logs on the west side of Camp Pleasant.
- Replaced the decking on Churchill Dam.
- Jacked and leveled the Round Pond Camp (T6 R11).
- The actuator on the deep gate at Churchill Dam was rebuilt and reinstalled on the dam.
- Worked with the AWW Foundation on publication of the Allagash Explorer pocket guide.
- Replaced old PVC plumbing with new PEX tubing at the Round Pond and Allagash lake camps.
- Cleared sweepers from Allagash Stream.
- Installed new flooring in the bedroom of the Kellogg Brook Camp.
- Eight cord of firewood was cut, split and stacked at Chamberlain Bridge.
- Stained the following buildings in the Chamberlain Lake District: shop, Round Pond Camp, Lock Dam Camp, woodshed and generator shed.
- Cleared, re-blazed and painted 13,600 feet of boundary line in T6 R11.
- Staff installed 13 new picnic tables with tarp poles and repaired a few outhouses at various campsites.

Dam Inspection Report – John Skelly, Dam Inspector, MEMA

At this point, Matt asked John to give a briefing on the results of his inspections of the Lock, Telos and Churchill Dams. John discussed various observations of the condition of Lock Dam (outlet structure rebuilt recently) and Churchill Dam, with the advice that the AWW continue to monitor the concerns discussed. John spent a greater amount of time discussing the condition of the Telos Dam; he reviewed an inspection report prepared in 2016 and concurred with its findings. He went into some detail on his current assessment of known problems at the dam, some of which have been addressed with remedial maintenance work in recent years, particularly leakage around gates and through the dam piers, and recommended that the Bureau continue monitoring the situation and consider the remedial measures recommended in the 2016 report. John also commented on the options for repair of the dam and dam replacement and stated his formal report would be forthcoming.

Questions

Brent asked John to comment further on the options at Telos Dam, and if the ~\$1 million estimate given in the 2016 report for dewatering and repair would result in preserving the dam a while longer so that the investment would be worthwhile. John replied that it appeared the situation was stable though it is possible the dam could fail quickly; he reiterated that seepage is the main problem. He stated that the state could replace planking on the dam that is being affected by the current leakage, but it is uncertain how much time this would buy; dam replacement would likely cost considerably more than repair but could last 80 years. John advised that additional study would be needed to make a full evaluation, and that the State would need to conduct a cost/benefit analysis to make an informed judgment on dam repair vs. replacement.

Jim MacCartney asked John to clarify his comments on the risk of catastrophic failure of Telos Dam and to discuss possible efficiencies of phased vs. full repair. John replied that the risk is hard to quantify with a timber crib dam; the biggest threat is seepage under the left portion of the dam under the inoperable gates, and noted that all the gates leak despite work the Bureau has done, allowing water to flow into the rock and timber piers. However, he has observed no major settlement, and felt a major risk is not apparent at the moment. He stated that full repair is probably more efficient than a phased approach, due to the need to dewater the dam for any repair work and the associated permitting. He reported that building a new dam would be a multi-year project.

Continuation of Superintendent's Report

Situations in 2020:

- 4 –Boating assists: 3- swamped/damaged canoes in Chase Rapids; 1- swamped canoe on Churchill Lake.
- 5- Medical emergencies: All were evacuated by outfitters.
- 1- Missing/lost person
- 2 – Forest fires
- 1- Attempt to locate
- 1- Visitor conflict
- 1- Dog bite
- 1- Illegal camping
- 1- Theft
- 1- Criminal Mischief – summons issued by IF&W
- 2- Summons were issued by AWW rangers for violation of AWW rule 2.4 (Resource Damage)

Special activity permits:

- Can-Am sled dog race – crossing the AWW at Round Pond
- Two permits to use a drone were issued

Personnel Changes:

- We had quite a few openings to fill at the beginning of the season and internal movement this spring/summer. With all the internal movement we did not have a full crew all summer.
- Roger Lawrence was hired as the Assistant Ranger at Round Pond.
- Ethan Cooley was hired as one of the Assistant Rangers at Churchill.
- Steve Day left Umsaskis and took a Park Manager position at Roque Bluffs State Park.
- Bob Johnston transferred from Allagash Lake to Umsaskis.
- Assistant Ranger Ben Hall was promoted to the Ranger at Allagash Lake.
- Assistant Ranger Alissa Lutz transferred to Chamberlain Bridge.
- I have submitted the paperwork to retire on April 2, 2021.

Training:

- Kevin and I took an abbreviated spring staff meeting to Chamberlain Bridge, Churchill Dam and Michaud Farm out of concerns for COVID-19.
- Chainsaw training for all employees hired in the last three years (4- AWW staff and 1- Public Lands Forest Tech).
- Roger Lawrence took S-130 wildland fire training with MFS.
- Jay Young completed an online Windows course.
- Roger Lawrence and Ethan Cooley completed the Coast Guard Power Squadron boating course.
- Trevor, Jay and Bob attended BMP/water quality training - sponsored by MFS.
- Ben Hall attended the BPL ranger academy.
- Ed Palys attended the two-day verbal judo section of the ranger academy.
- Matt, Kevin, Trevor and Jay took Cyber Security training.
- Matt and Jay attended ½ day InReach training – sponsored by Garmin.
- Matt LaRoche completed an EMT course.

Miscellaneous:

- Ice out occurred on the AWW headwater lakes on May 4th and 5th, except Allagash Lake which cleared of ice on May 7th.
- We had 130- applications for the first AWW artist in residence program. Michael Vermette was selected as the winner. He provided a workshop at Nugent's Camps on August 3rd, attended by 8- people.
- We put wheelchair ramp installations out to bid at Chamberlain Bridge and Michaud Farm. No bids were received.
- We put out the repair of the deep gate at Churchill Dam out to bid. No bids were received for this project either.
 - These projects will be put out to bid again in the spring.
- The barn at Churchill needs the following repairs:
 - Jacked-up and leveled
 - Re-shingled
 - I am working with the real property division to put that project out to bid.

Matt concluded his report by presenting on a shared screen a series of slides illustrating water conditions, maintenance sites, completed projects, etc. as reported above.

Follow-up Questions/Comments

Dave commented on the installation of new fire tower cabs at Allagash Mtn. and Round Pond by the BPL North Region, congratulated Matt on the large amount of maintenance work completed this year, and praised the newly released Allagash Explorer Guidebook, a project of the Allagash Waterway Foundation.

Brent commented on the need to pursue funding for repair of the Churchill barn roof, and that he needed to understand more about new funding that may be available from NPS. Jim MacCartney, National Park Service rep. on the Council,

said he would look into it further. Andy reported that he learned through conversations with Doug Beck, who administers the state side of the LWCF program for the Bureau, that historic property designation precludes use of LWCF funds on that property. He said he would look into a grant program from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that may be applicable to historic structures.

Andy commended Matt on an article he wrote on the AWW that was recently published in Northern Woodlands magazine, and reported that an ecological inventory of the AWW is scheduled to begin next summer, with the participation of the Bureau and Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) and supported by the AWW Foundation.

Update on the AWW Visitor's Survey Report - Matt

Matt explained that the report had been delayed by the departure of the graduate student who was preparing it, but that UMO Professor John Daigle who directed the project has completed it. It is currently under peer review and the final report will be presented at the March meeting.

Visitor Use and Management Needs at the Tramway – Matt

Matt outlined the history of increased foot access to the historic locomotives and the tramway over several decades, from a “bushwack” to user-created trails and culminating in the authorization of an official access trail and improvement of a road bringing walk-in visitors closer to the public lands in 2017. Matt reported visitor use numbers for the site based on NMW data (which likely greatly under-report actual use), indicating a several-fold increase in use over the past 5 years and a doubling in the 2020 season (possibly due in part to the effects of the COVID-19 situation).

Matt stated he wants to install a trail use counter to get better use numbers, as well information/rules signage at the trailhead (with efforts to make it attractive so it won't be ignored), and historic information panels about the trains and the tramway. He expressed concern about the effect of the high number of walk-in visitors on the experience of AWW visitors (paddlers and fishermen) who expect a quiet wilderness experience and stated that AWW needs to manage the two potentially conflicting uses as best we can with Public Lands and Seven Islands, the abutting private landowner.

Comments:

- Brent commented that the history of the site is very important, and that a lot of misinformation on the history is available online etc., so that visitors don't know the true history. He further highlighted the lack of historic signage at the site and expressed his support for the development of such signage at the site (not at the trailhead).
- Josie commented that the AWW should wait to see if the recent high use is temporary or continues, and that she is concerned that people she encounters do not seem properly prepared for the trip to the site. She stated her belief that it is a public historic site and therefore anyone who wants to visit the site should be able to do so and the trail is part of that; she commented that she had never perceived a conflict with boat-in visitors during her visits to the site.
- Dave and Peter commented in support of the preceding comments by Brent and Josie and the need for historic information at the site. Peter also asked if there was any concern about winter use.
- Matt replied that winter use is likely higher than summer use but he is not aware of any conflict. He also commented that there is information on the historic features of the site in the Explorer guide, and he prefers that to on-site signage.
- Brent commented that he disagreed with Matt on that point – there should be signs at the site as most visitors will not have the Explorer or other information; signs could be located to not be visible from the waterway.
- Toby voice agreement with Brent's comments
- Josie commented that signs could be designed that are visually appropriate for the AWW, and that it is a shame that people go there with no understanding of the history of what they are seeing
- Dave commented in agreement with Brent and Josie and that he doesn't believe that AWW paddlers' trip will be spoiled by seeing people (walk-in visitors) at the train given the isolation they experience on most of their trip.
- Al Cowperthwaite commented that a visit to the locomotives and tramway is a great day trip for NMW visitors; they have been photocopying historic information to give to visitors and are working on putting together a brochure that

will include information on the history of the trains and tramway. He also stated that NMW may be able to maintain the trailhead outhouse although it is not near any of the campsites they maintain.

- On other topics, Al commented that visits to NMW were down early in the year but were high in the later part of the season; that NMW has increased available campsites and road access is response to increased visits to the trains; he also commented on the 50th anniversary of NMW in 2021 and observed that he had been working with Matt in the region for 40+ years.

Update on Status of Boarding House Improvements – Matt

Matt stated there was not much new to report, but that AWW had replaced a broken window on the structure. He commented that AWW will need to prioritize all the various capital improvement needs, and tough choices will have to be made. He stated the AWW capital improvement account from visitor fees that can be drawn from for these needs will be down due to the decrease in out-of-state visitors this year.

Comments:

- Dave asked Ron if he had an update on potential funding sources from his Sept. 2019 report to the Council.
- Ron stated that bond funding may become available at some point in the future, but that other grants without historical designation restrictions like LWCF may need to be relied upon. Telos dam would still qualify as it is not on the national historic register.
- Brent commented on the need to pursue grant funding for this purpose, and the need to not lose sight of the goal to go beyond maintenance to complete restoration of the boarding house so that it can be used.
- Josie commented that the AWW needed to pursue funds to get the roof fixed, and that it would be a shame to lose the building due to unaddressed roof problems.
- Andy commented that he recognizes the importance of the boarding house, while noting that it is one among many needs for infrastructure improvements and maintenance in the state parks system.

Plan and Procedure to Replace AWW Superintendent Matt LaRoche - Andy

Andy stated that he expects there will be qualified in-house candidates, but that the intention is to cast a wide net with internal and external recruitment recognizing the high profile and importance of the position. The Bureau would prefer to overlap Matt's tenure with the new Superintendent and will be able to issue an "anticipated vacancy" job posting before Matt's retirement. The Chair of the AWW Council could sit in on the interviews as a non-participating member.

Comments

- Brent commented that there will be large shoes to fill in replacing Matt, but that he hopes there is someone within the AWW system who can move into the position, someone who understands the management history of the waterway and who has the qualities that Matt has that are very important to the position.
- Andy reported that he will be checking with the Governor's office on the status of Advisory Council appointments, including the replacement of Melford Pelletier (2nd term expired in Oct.) and the reappointment of Peter Bourque.

Public Comment

- Bob McIntosh, AWWF, offered a "hats off" to the Bureau and AWW on a successful year. He announced there are 7 new members of the foundation board, bringing the total to 20. Bob noted that they have postponed their usual meetings and programs this year but are working on programs for youth and schools for next year. Regarding the launch of the Explorer guide, sales were slower than hoped for initially but they are getting new orders from the outlets carrying it and it is available on-line. Regarding the natural resource inventory: the project was initiated in the spring with collection of existing information; Janet McMahon is the Principal Investigator; there will be two field seasons (2021 and 2022), and a report is expected in 2023 that will cover baseline conditions and monitoring.

Election of New Chair for 2021

- Chair Dave Basley stated he will not offer himself for 2021.
- Brent moved to nominate Peter Bourque, the nomination was seconded by Toby, and unanimously accepted by voice acclamation. Peter's role as Chair will be contingent upon his re-appointment for a second term.

Closing Comments

- Andy thanked all for their participation and commented that the meeting via Teams videoconference went well, with good attendance.
- Brent suggested dates for 2021 meetings; a date of March 19 was set for the first meeting and dates of suggested dates for subsequent meetings in June, Sept. and December will be discussed further later.

Adjournment

Dave moved and Peter seconded adjournment of the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at appx. 11:40 am.